

Problem of Evil

If an omnibenevolent, omnipotent, and omniscient God exists, then evil cannot exist.

Evil exists.

Therefore, no such God exists.

Omnibenevolence

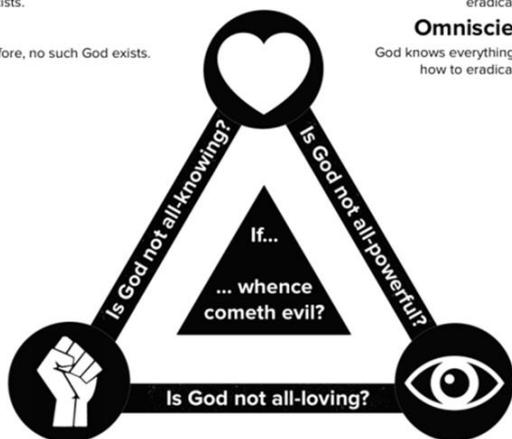
God is all-loving (and would want to eradicate evil)

Omnipotence

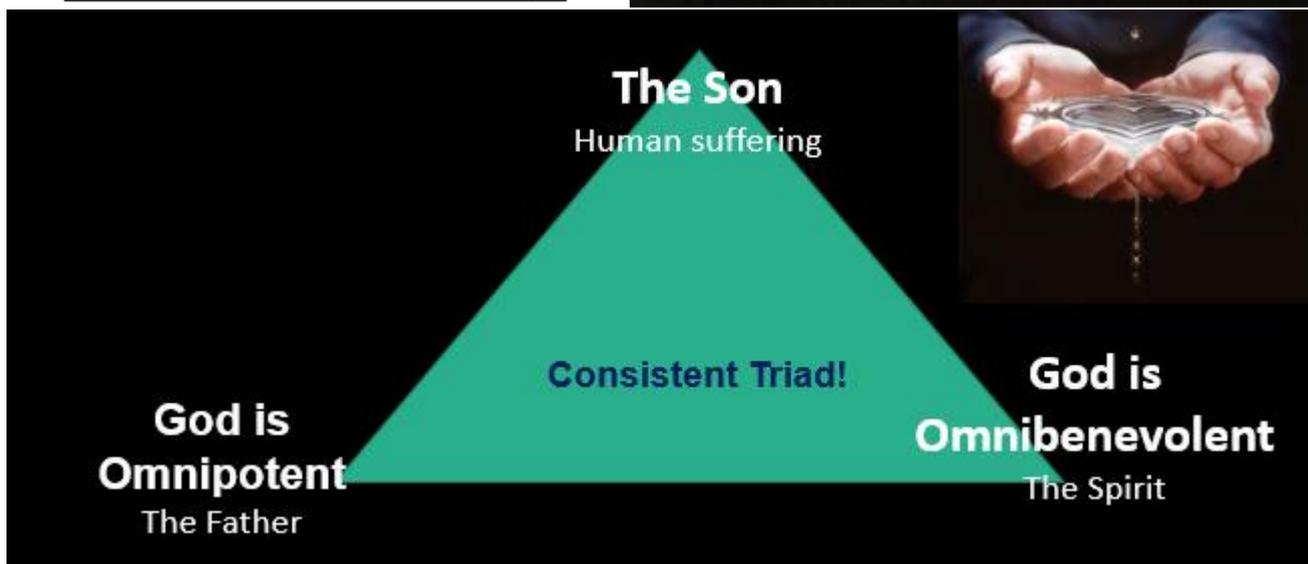
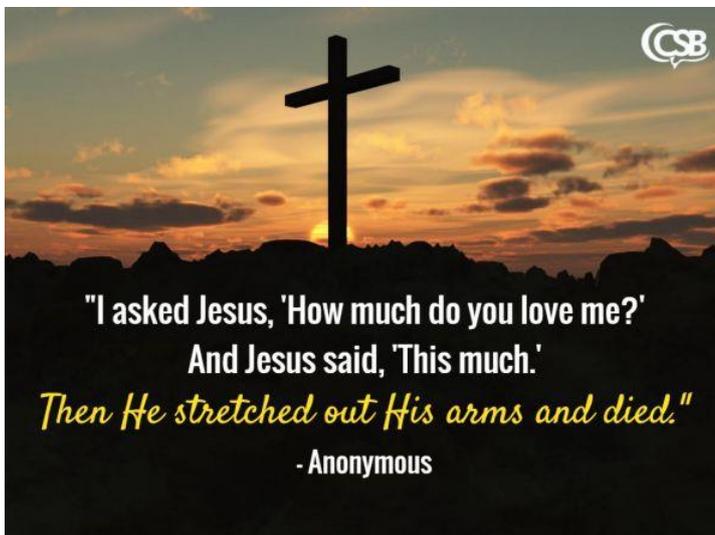
God can do anything (even eradicate evil)

Omniscience

God knows everything (even how to eradicate evil)



Problem of Evil Triangle
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Foundational Catholic Theology

**Theme 2:
Good and Evil**

Theme 3: Good and Evil

Good/evil	<i>good</i> – that which is considered morally right, beneficial and to our advantage <i>evil</i> – that which is considered extremely immoral, wicked and wrong
Forgiveness	to grant pardon for a wrongdoing; to give up resentment and the desire seek revenge against a wrongdoer
Free will	the ability to make choices voluntarily and independently. The belief that nothing is pre-determined
Justice	fairness; where everyone has equal provisions and opportunity
Morality	principles and standards determining which actions are right or wrong
Punishment	a penalty given to someone for a crime or wrong they have done
Sin	deliberate immoral action, breaking a religious or moral law
Suffering	pain or distress caused by injury, illness or loss. Suffering can be physical, emotional/psychological or spiritual.

Catholic perspectives on the origin of evil: Where does evil come from?

Catholics believe God is omnipotent and omnibenevolent. God made a good world – God could not do it any other way. Why do we have evil and suffering?

Catholics answer this question by looking at the concept of free will: the gift from God of the human ability to make choices over goodness or evil. We divide this further into 2 areas: Moral evil = Evil that is the result of human actions: bullying, heft, poverty, murder, war.

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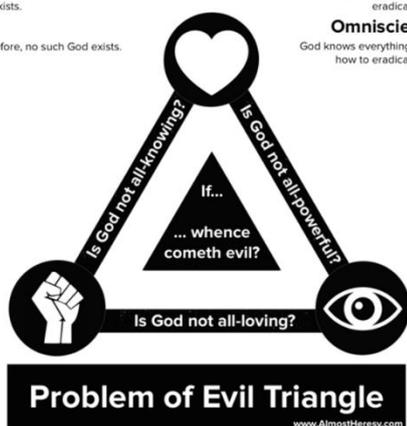
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Natural evil = events that cause great suffering, but happen in the natural world and are not caused by human actions – e.g. earthquakes, tsunamis, disease, famine.

But where does this evil come from?

1. **Read through your notes** from lesson of the learning concerning the story of 'The Fall' in Genesis chapter 3. Can you relate the term 'Original sin'? What matters here is your ability to explain how a fundamentalist and a liberalist would understand it.

Remember, Catholics believe this story is a description of a real, prehistoric



event, told through figurative language. For Catholics, the story demonstrates the human ability to turn away from God and the tendency to sin and the shared responsibility for evil and suffering in the world today. Other Christians will believe it to be literally true. St Augustine thought much about the existence of evil and suffering and produced 3 main ideas, as shown and explained below.

St Augustine
354-430BCE



In his handbook 'Enchiridion', Augustine asks himself the reason why there is evil and suffering if God is all good and all powerful. He gives 3 answers to this question:

Answer 1: Evil helps us appreciate good – Augustine says sometimes we don't appreciate the good things until they are not there anymore. The existence of evil helps people to appreciate the good in the world they otherwise might not notice: *'for we enjoy and value the good more when we compare it with the evil.'*

Answer 2: Evil is not a thing – Augustine says God does not permit or cause evil because evil is not a thing. Evil is a privation (absence) of good things. God doesn't want us to be deprived of good things, but either our choices have led to these privations, or God allows them for some greater good. *'For what is that we call evil but the absence of good? Disease and wounds are... the absence of health..'*

Answer 3: Evil makes us better – Augustine says God allows suffering because he is omnipotent and good. He allows evil because in his goodness and power he is always to bring about a greater good. Sometimes, therefore, suffering is good for us! *'For the Almighty God... can bring good even out of evil.'*

Apply task: For your books:

1. Who is St Augustine?
2. What question was he trying to answer?
3. What does 'evil as a privation' mean? Why would God allow it?
4. Which of the reasons for evil do you agree with the most and why? In your answer, you need to discuss all 3.

Other approaches to evil and suffering have developed over time. Here they are in summary form:

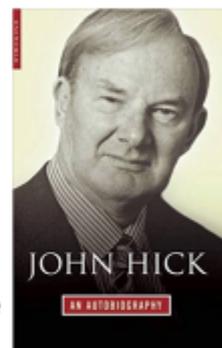
Another view: St. Irenaeus - evil could be traced back to human **Free Will**. However, he differed from Augustine by saying that God did not make a perfect world and that evil has a valuable part to play in God's plan for humanity.



He thought that God created humans imperfectly in order that they could develop into perfection over time.... He thought that evil allows us to develop virtues such as compassion and mercy, which are needed for perfection.

To know other views on the nature and origin of evil

John Hick supported the Irenaean Theodicy - God didn't make us into robots! If God had made humanity perfectly, then we would have the **goodness of robots**, which means that we would automatically love God *without thought or question*. Such love would be **valueless** and if God wanted humans to be genuinely loving, then he had to let us have the **freedom** to develop this love for ourselves. It is only through such suffering that human beings can 'grow in God's likeness' → leads to a healthier soul.



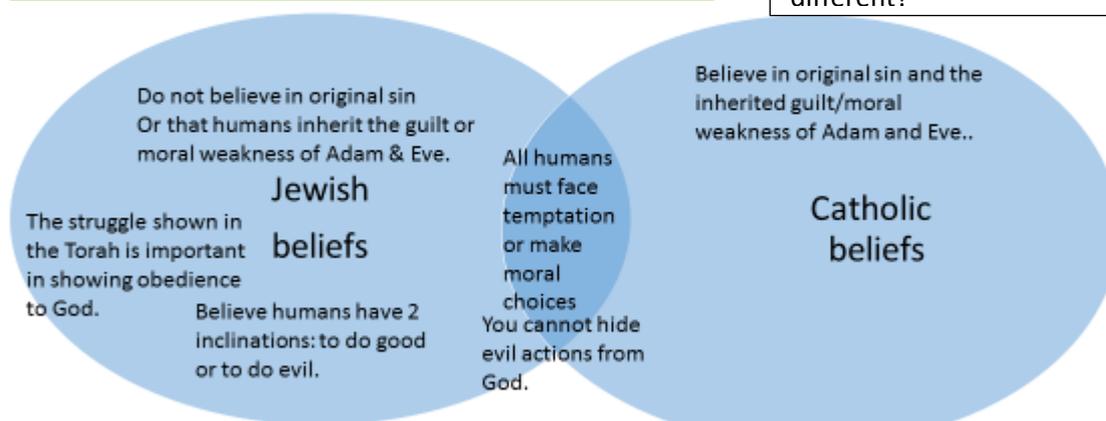
Another idea related to these is the following:

Goodness and perfection had to be developed by humans themselves, through willing co-operation with God. This meant that God had to give them free will and such freedom requires the possibility of choosing evil over good.

To achieve this, God had to create humans at an **EPISTEMIC DISTANCE** from him – a distance in *knowledge or dimension*, by which God is not so close that humans would be **overwhelmed** by him and have no choice but to **believe** and **obey**. By keeping a distance, God allows humans to freely choose.

To know other views on the nature and origin of evil

Task box: Can you explain in your own words how Catholic and Jewish beliefs on the nature and origin of evil are similar and different?



Record on your Venn diagram Catholic and Jewish beliefs on the origin of evil.
How are they similar?
How do they differ?

What about non-religious challenges posed by belief in God's goodness?

You have studied at least 2 different philosopher's views with regard to this question: David Hume and John Mackie.

Here are their views in summary form – which do you agree with the most and why? How do they compare with the views of St. Augustine, St. Irenaeus and John Hick?



David Hume, atheist & Scottish Philosopher (1711-1776) presented this argument, called the 'Inconsistent Triad.'

It finishes with the premise that either God is not good, or is not all powerful; or God does not exist. Hume believed God did not exist.

Another philosopher: John Mackie, 1917 -1981

I reject the idea of Augustine that evil is necessary as an opposite to good. Everyone can, for example, appreciate a kind person. I think there is far more suffering than is actually needed.

I also reject the idea that suffering helps us become better people. Why would God need to make us better through suffering? Why can't God make us perfect to start with? Suffering doesn't always make us better people: some do improve, others become bitter and resentful. Why does some evil lead to greater evils?



I also reject the idea that evil is a consequence of free will. Why can't God make free human beings who always choose good instead of evil? I feel having evil and suffering is far too high a price to pay for us having free will.

New information: Using p84-86, complete the mind map.
 1. Check your understanding with your partner.
 2. Make sure you have a source of authority for Catholics for each view.



A mind map on Catholic approaches to suffering

Task box:
 From your class notes, revisit these themes and add notes around the bubbles.
 The theme studied was: **'Catholic ambivalence to suffering: is suffering always evil?'**

Complete this chart, using the Catholic and Jewish information about suffering on p86

View	Catholic	Jewish
Isaiah 53 predicts Jesus' life and death for human sins		
Ambivalent towards suffering		
God gave humans free will and they can either use it to do good or evil		
Original sin was introduced to the world via the events of the fall		
God is good and created a good world		
Humans can't understand the reasons for suffering		

It is important you can relate the important text of Isaiah 53 – how Jesus is described as the 'suffering servant'. When Christians suffer, it is a way to bring them closer to an understanding of Jesus' suffering, death and salvation of humanity. Catholics will understand that suffering can never be 'good', but a mystery from God that can bring about good. During Mass, a Catholic will remember those who are suffering and ask God's help for all those in need. Some will become doctors, nurses and aid workers to help those in need.

Do you know the Jewish attitudes to suffering?

The Trinity:

God is Trinity!

What do Christians believe about the Trinity?

Christians believe that although God is one, he is experienced in the world as a Trinity—the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. This means that Christians believe in one God in three persons or, to put it more simply, that God is three in one. Water is a good way to explain this: water can be experienced as a solid (ice), a liquid or as gas (steam), but it's still water.

The three persons of God are:

- The Father who created everything and to whom Christians pray.
- The Son (Jesus) who revealed God to us and who saves people from sin.
- The Holy Spirit who is God's presence in the world today and who inspires Christians.

Christians do not worship three Gods, but one God who is a unity.



Why is it important for Christians to believe in God as the Trinity?

- In the Old Testament (Gen 1:26) it says 'God said "let us make man in our image"'. The word 'us' means that God must have persons.
- At Jesus' baptism the Father, son and Holy Spirit are present. The Father speaks, the Son is baptised and the Holy Spirit appears in the form of a dove.
- The Trinity is referred to elsewhere in the new Testament (e.g. 2 Cor13:14, 1Pet 1:2, Eph 4:4-6).
- All of the creeds (statements of belief) teach that God is a Trinity and Christians are supposed to believe the creeds.
- The Church teaches that God is Trinity in the Catechism (book of the Church's teachings), and Catholics should believe the Catechism.

Key word! Trinity: the belief that God is three in one.



Christians believe there is only one God. God exists as 3 persons: Father, Son & Holy Spirit. Each of the 3 persons is distinct from the other two. Each of the 3 persons is fully God, but there are not 3 gods. This is the doctrine of the Trinity. Even though the word 'Trinity' does not appear in the bible, the doctrine developed over hundreds of years. It is a mystery of faith and helps us understand some of the identity of God. The doctrine of the Trinity is set out in the Nicene Creed, where the 3 persons have their distinct roles explained:

Father: Creator of heaven and earth.

Son: saviour of the world.

Spirit: invisible & spiritual power who guides, helps and inspires humans.

The Nicene Creed is also said at Mass by everyone as a public declaration of faith. This binds them together as a faith community.

Catholics value the concept of the Trinity as it declares Jesus as God. Catholics also show this in

their prayer: the sign of the cross is Trinitarian, and the Eucharistic prayer finishes with reference to the Trinity: 'Through him, and with him and in him...'

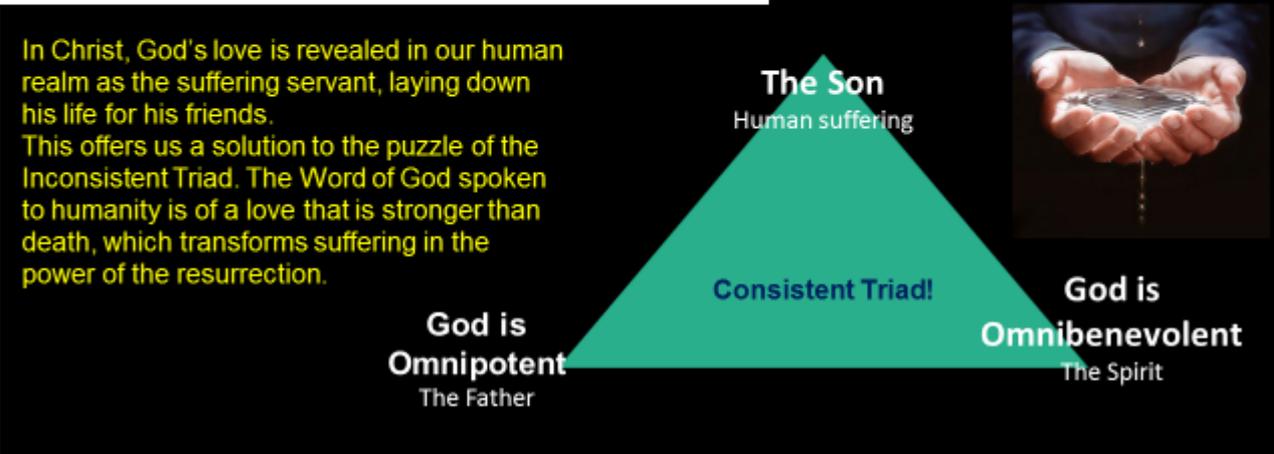
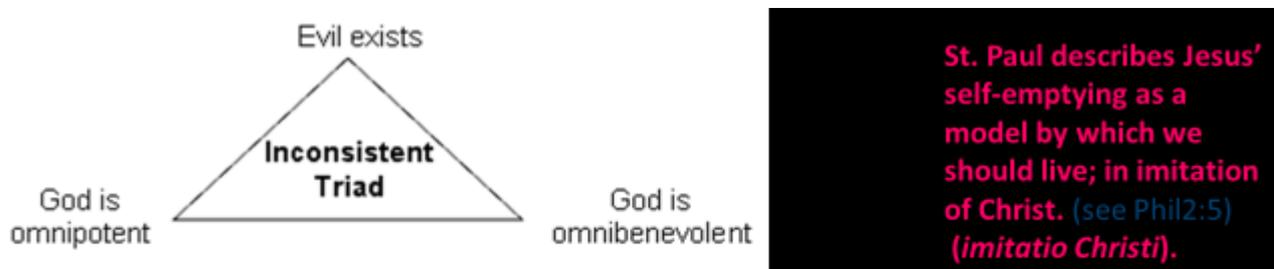
St Augustine developed the concept of Trinity when he used the words from John's Gospel: **'God is Love'**. These are his words: **'There are three things in love, as it were a trace of the Trinity... love is of someone that loves, and with love something is loved. Behold, then, there are three things: he that loves, and that which is loved, and love.'** In this way, Augustine is saying the Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit is love, lover and beloved (or: the person doing the loving (Father, the person who is being loved (the Son) & the love itself (the Holy Spirit)).

Incarnation: means 'made flesh'. Jesus is fully human and fully divine. You have studied the opening words of John's Gospel 'In the beginning was the Word'. John calls Jesus 'the Word', and he is God's creative power. The Incarnation is visible in the conclusion to that passage 'The Word became flesh and dwelt among us'.

You have also studied the 'Kenosis Hymn' of St Paul, where Jesus 'emptied himself' to share in our humanity: **'and being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross.'** (Phil2:8). The belief in the incarnation helps Christians understand that God became human and suffered. Jesus suffered and was willing to take on that suffering, so everything we suffer, he has also suffered and when we suffer, he is with us in our suffering. You looked at the concept of the the Consistent Triad (see pic below).

Pope St John Paul II explained further the power of suffering in his document 'Salvifici Doloris' (which means 'the saving power of suffering') → Christians can willingly 'offer up' their suffering in

prayer for the sake of others, and hence share in the saving suffering of Jesus. God can use our suffering offered up in this way for the sake of others: **‘Those who share in Christ’s suffering have before their eyes the Paschal Mystery of the Cross and Resurrection..’**



Lesson 53-54:
To understand Jesus as Incarnate Son
To know the basis of the Incarnation in scripture

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5kN6D6RFqLA> What is the incarnation?

Early Christians knew calling Jesus truly God and truly man was controversial.

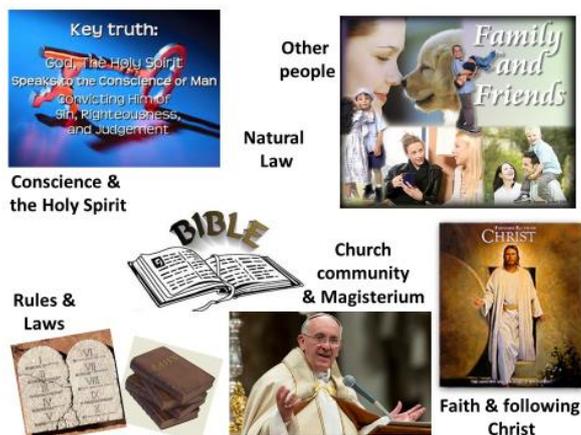
What is meant by the word 'Incarnation'?

It means 'in flesh. God is present specially in the human Jesus.

He was really born, grew, reached manhood. He could be touched, bleed and be killed.

He did not appear to take flesh (as in avatars in Hinduism, or as a pagan god in disguise).

Your task:
Can you explain what 'Incarnation' means?



Jesus and Moral Authority:

Catholics try to model themselves on Jesus. Jesus gave us the Golden Rule, told his disciples to love one another and lived this out in his healings and treatment of outcasts and sinners. He showed forgiveness on the cross and in the Sermon on the Mount showed his followers how to behave. This is found in Matthew's gospel, chapters 5-7. It begins 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.' → how do

these 'blessings' challenge the values of the world?

Jesus' teachings here challenge, further and deepen the Law of Moses. Moses' law said murder was unacceptable, but Jesus continues 'But I say to you...' that anger is unacceptable. Being a follower of Jesus is more demanding: turn the other cheek, love your enemies, give in secret, pray and fast in secret...

Catholics also have another means of discerning moral authority:

Natural Law: the idea that there is a moral law applicable to all humans. St Thomas Aquinas proposed the concept: at a basic level, humans should do good and avoid evil. Catholics



would say this shows a universe created by God, and God is good. The fact that humans can tell good actions from evil ones shows we have a God-given ability to distinguish good from evil.

Conscience: Catholics must make sure their conscience is informed by the bible and tradition. This would result in less evil in the world. A conscience is:

1. Given to us by God
2. Part of our human nature as designed by God.
3. Active – together with human reason (recta ratio) it enables us to discern the good.
4. The moral principles it discerns are together called the NATURAL LAW.

Virtues: Living a good life and following your conscience takes practice, and following these moral habits is called 'virtues', and enable us to become good people. Virtues challenge us to live less selfishly and think of others.

Sculpture and Statuary:

Statue: a large art object, often representing a person or an animal, that is made from a hard material, esp. stone or metal

Sculpture: the art of carving, modeling, welding, or otherwise producing figurative or abstract works of art in three dimensions, as in relief, intaglio, or in the round.

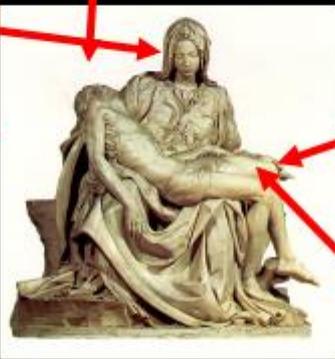
Symbolism: the use of any of certain special figures or marks of identification to signify a religious message or divine being, such as the cross for Christ and the Christian faith.

Venerate: to regard with reverential respect or with admiring deference: to honour (as an icon or a relic) with a ritual act of devotion

Statues are common features in Catholic churches. Crucifixes remind us of the incarnation. Often candles are lit in front of statues, asking for intercession from the saints for their prayer intention.

Other Christian traditions, such as **Protestants**, do not have statues as it goes against the 2nd commandment. They would use a simple cross instead. **Jews**, also, do not use statues as a focus for prayer for the same reason. They would not represent God, who is beyond all human understanding, in any way.

Catholics use statues to reflect on the meaning of suffering. One we have studied and you need to know about is Michelangelo's Pieta. Look at the information below and answer the questions:



Mary looks very youthful – Michelangelo defended this as Mary was a chaste woman and would age less.

It was badly damaged in 1972 and fully restored – a matter of debate. It stands in St Peter's basilica, Rome.

Mary's outstretched left arm beckons us to share her profound grief at the loss of her only son.

Considered by many to be Michelangelo's best work. Completed when he was 24 years old. He signed his name across Mary's chest & later regretted this as an act of vanity

Q: How does it show 'Virgin mother, daughter of your Son'? A reference to Dante's poem *Paradiso*?

Mary invites us to share in her suffering and to breathe life into Christ, becoming 'Christ-bearer'

Mary's hands are larger, male-like hands, representing the male craftsman powered by the fertility of the female body.. Common theme... → Relates to St. Francis' idea of anyone becoming Christ's mother by bearing Him in their hearts

A sample of how task B might look...

Key point: All holy images, statues or icons speak of God's goodness & love for Christians. Why? .. They remind us of the incarnation... they also sometimes remind us that God understand human suffering

Study the Pieta information and picture and answer these questions:

1. How is God found as good in the Pieta?
2. How is human suffering shown to have meaning and purpose in the Pieta?
3. What is special about Mary's hands in the sculpture?
4. Is life all about suffering and how we deal with it? Write your thoughts about this question, with reference to the Pieta.

Popular devotion in Catholic communities in Britain and elsewhere

Tasks: List as many reasons as you can for going on a pilgrimage.

Why are pilgrimages important for Catholics?

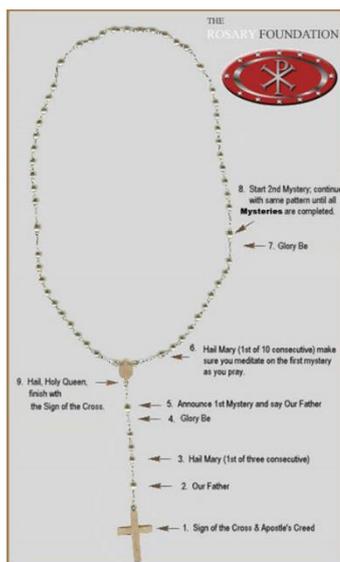
- ✓ Reflect on life's journey
- ✓ Focus on journey to God away from life's distractions
- ✓ Journey of self-discovery in sickness

- ✓ Enables the sick to accept their suffering
- ✓ Value the role of God in their lives
- ✓ Some are cured (but very few).

Task: look back at the work produced about Lourdes: 1858 Bernadette had a series of visions of Our Lady. Thousands travel there today to pray at the grotto. Young people volunteer for the sick and disabled → life-changing experience.

→ What other shrines of Mary can you talk about?

Popular piety: this means forms of prayer and worship inspired by culture rather than liturgy. E.g. the rosary.



The rosary beads enable a Catholic to concentrate on their prayers. Look at the sequence on the picture here. Catholics pray the mysteries of the rosary, which are some of the events of Jesus' & Mary's lives. They meditate on these. We focused on the sorrowful mysteries: how would each mystery help Catholics find meaning in evil and suffering?

The 5 sorrowful mysteries are:

The agony in the garden / the scourging at the pillar/ the crowning with thorns/ Jesus is made to carry his cross/ Jesus is crucified and dies on the cross.

The other mysteries are: the joyful mysteries/the luminous/ and the glorious mysteries.

Sample exam questions:

A questions: 2 marks: You will have one 2 mark question.

What is 'free will'? (2 marks)

What do Catholics mean by Incarnation?

B questions: 5 marks: You will have one 5 mark question.

Describe the difference between natural and moral evil. (5 marks)

Describe the teaching of the Catholic Church on the origin of evil.

Describe Catholic teaching on the Trinity.

Describe the importance of statues for Catholics.

Describe the difference between natural and moral evil.

Describe the importance of suffering for Catholics.

C questions: 8 marks: You will have one 8 mark question.

Explain from two different religions/religious traditions the reasons for the problem of evil. (8 marks)

Explain how a Catholic might respond to the problem of evil and suffering.

Explain why belief in the Trinity is important to Catholics.

Explain how the Incarnation helps Catholics to deal with suffering.

Explain different perspectives on the use of statues .

Explain what the Pieta reveals about a Catholic understanding of suffering.

Explain the importance of pilgrimage for Catholics.

Explain the importance of Jesus' moral authority for Catholics.

Explain from Catholic Christianity and Judaism or from two Christians traditions whether or not Jesus may be considered the source for moral authority. (8)

D questions: 15 marks: You will have two in this section of the exam. 15 marks each.

(i) 'A loving God would not let people suffer.' Discuss this statement showing you have considered more than one point of view. (You must refer to religion and belief in your answer) (15 marks)

(ii) 'The existence of suffering proves God does not exist.' Discuss this statement showing you have considered more than one point of view. (You must refer to religion and belief in your answer) (15 marks)

'Jesus' moral teachings are not relevant for today.' Discuss this statement showing you have considered more than one point of view. (You must refer to religion and belief in your answer) (15 marks)

'The only authority we should follow is our own conscience.' Discuss this statement showing you have considered more than one point of view. (You must refer to religion and belief in your answer) (15 marks)

'All Christians should go on a pilgrimage to a religious place such as Lourdes, once in their life.' Discuss this statement showing you have considered more than one point of view. (You must refer to religion and belief in your answer) (15 marks)